

The University of Chicago

FORMAL CHANGE IN RECENT AMERICAN PAINTING

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ART

1938

By

WALLACE SPENCER BALDINGER

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FORMAL CHANGE IN RECENT AMERICAN PAINTING

By WALLACE SPENCER BALDINGER

AN AMERICAN art historian writes in 1888 of a painting done seven years before by his fellow countryman, Carl Marr. He notes that the title given it is "Mystery." Such prompting leads him to speculate over the way the girl lying upon the beach may have met her death. He at length concludes:

"It is all a mystery, and the painter leaves it where life leaves it, unexplained but pathetic in the extreme, and full of poetry in its deep-blue sky and watching stars and surging sea, its loneliness and desolation, its contrast between living and dead, between youth and age, between beauty and the wreck of wasting years."¹

This criticism undoubtedly pleased the reader for whom it was intended. It may well have pleased the painter himself if he came upon the passage. But such a criticism tells us little about the painting itself. It may tell us much about the art historian who wrote it and about the day in which he lived. At the same time, it lays down a literary smoke-screen which, in a sense, hides the picture from our eyes.

To the art historian of today all things have their value. To him the subject of a work of art is important; so also are its psychological implications, its social content, its changing fate at the hands of critics. However, his primary concern is not with these things *about* the work of art; it is with the work of art itself. If that creation is a painting, his first consideration is its essential *visual form*.

The essential visual form of Carl Marr's *Mystery* is certainly less of a mystery than the title of the painting would imply. It yields to an act of seeing, and defines itself in terms of visual elements. We note that the figures of the girl and the old man are pushed fairly close to the picture plane and grouped with the rock about the central axis, thus forming a pyramidal composition. We note that the space is closed in rather definitely and constructed heavily with opaque shadows. We note that the distribution of the various units is static, that their contours are brittle, their modeling worried, their surfaces hard. Problems connected with applying the paint fluently to the canvas seem to have occupied the painter's attention less than has the problem of telling the story interestingly.

If we turn to other paintings of the time, we are struck by the number of formal elements each shares in common with the rest. A Thomas Eakins of 1888 furnishes one example: the Brooklyn Museum's portrait of Letitia Wilson Jordan Bacon (Fig. 1).² Uncertain of age and lost in reverie though she may be, Mrs. Bacon stands firmly near at hand, to afford us, perhaps, a careful look at her personable features, her elegant attire, the folding fan she holds. The wall under heavy shadow presses close behind her. Against it her figure rises pyramidally along the central axis. Details are illuminated sharply; their clarity of contour is assured by the lady's static pose; their brittleness of definition is inevitable to such a meticulously exact approach.

1. George William Sheldon, *Recent Ideals of American Art*, New York, 1890 (1st ed., 1888), p. 52.

2. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.



FIG. 1—*Brooklyn, Museum:*
Letitia Bacon, by
Thomas Eakins



FIG. 2—*Chicago, Art Institute: Music*
by Thomas Eakins

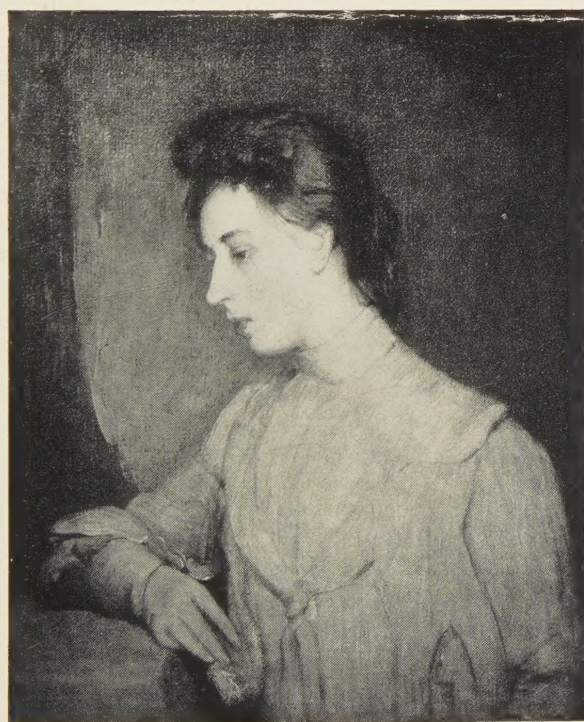


FIG. 3—*Private Collection: The Rose*
Pink Bodice, by J. Alden Weir



FIG. 4—*Boston, Museum: Mrs. Gilbert Parker*
by Thomas Eakins



FIG. 5—New York, Metropolitan Museum: *Italian Hill Town*, by A. B. Davies

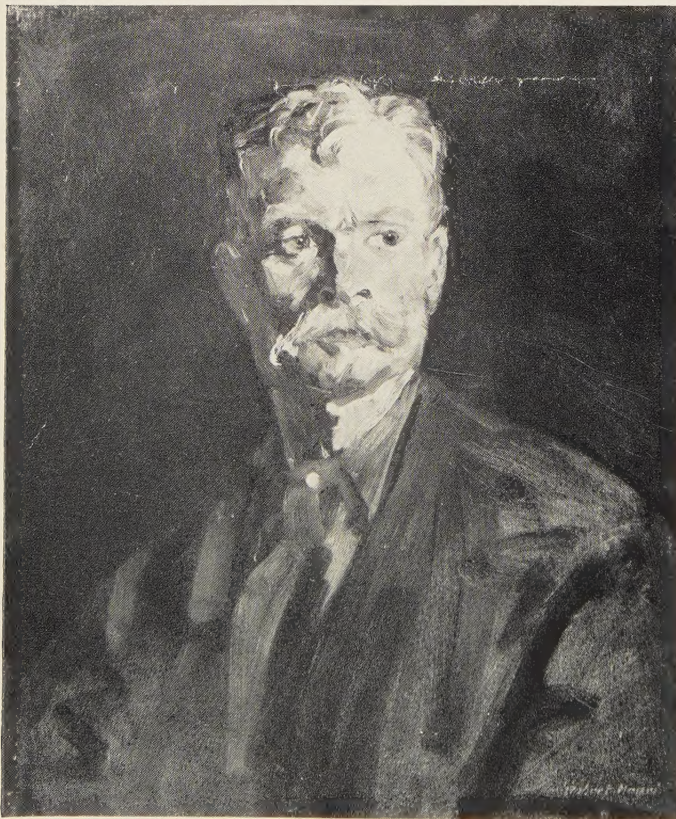


FIG. 6—New York, Metropolitan Museum: *Workingman*, by Robert Henri

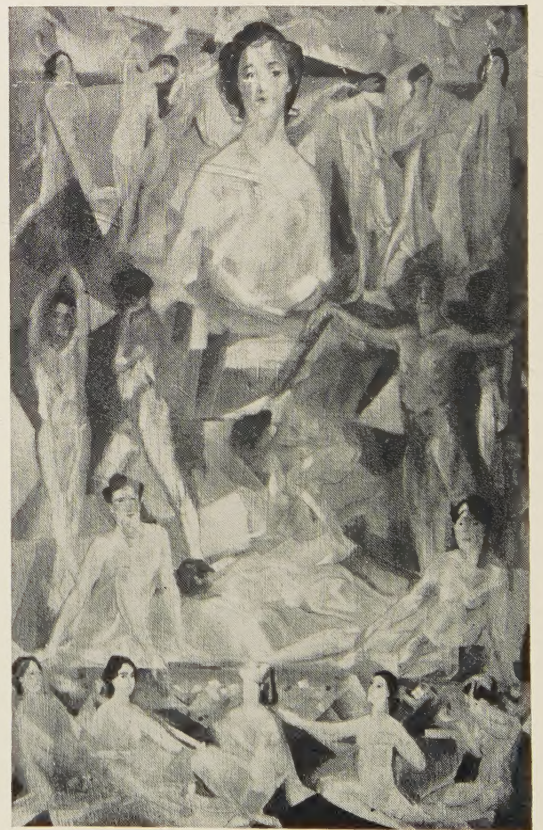


FIG. 7—Washington, Corcoran Gallery: *The Great Mother*, by A. B. Davies

Julian Alden Weir saw life through different eyes than did either Carl Marr or Thomas Eakins, and he expressed what he saw in appreciably gentler terms. Nevertheless, with the same form that Marr used to present his mystery and Eakins his matter-of-fact reality, Weir presents his *Roses*, of 1883, now in the Addison Gallery at Andover. It is the same tight, hard, and heavy style, precise in definition, opaque in light and shade, static and symmetrical in composition, delimited in spatial realization. Such, then, would seem to be a definite mode prevalent during the eighteen-eighties in the American school of painting.

By the end of the nineteenth century Eakins and Weir had gone on to something else. We see it in a Weir of 1898, *The Gray Bodice*, now in the Art Institute of Chicago. A young lady sits in three-quarters pose, her face turned demurely towards the spectator. Although she is placed as near to the picture plane, apparently, as was the painter's spray of roses, a curtain of mist hangs between her and the spectator. She is posed more casually, partly out of the frame, caught in a momentary attitude. A twist in her figure invites the eye to follow around her and on into depth; obliquely receding planes lead across her figure into a space uncertainly defined, mottled in tone, suggesting as much a woodland interior as the wall paper of a room. In contrast with the Weir of 1883, this painting conveys a transitory effect.

Correspondingly marked is the change in Eakins' art. We may observe it in *The Thinker*, of the Metropolitan, a work of 1900. Here a curtain of atmosphere moderates the value contrasts, fuses the details of the wrinkled suit, opens up the contours, sets the scholar farther back from the eye than was Mrs. Bacon. Then, too, the obliquely receding planes in this portrait, formed by the wall, the floor, and the shadow cast upon it, lead into depth and on to the world outside.

By 1904 this trend in Eakins' manner had become decidedly more insistent. The picture *Music*, of that year, now in the Art Institute of Chicago, is convincing evidence, for in it the momentary poses of the violinist and his accompanist receive a heightening of effect through the asymmetrical placing of the figures (Fig. 2).³ The position of the pianist is so arranged, in fact, as to face out of the picture and project beyond the frame at the lower right corner. In keeping with such an impression are the more mottled brushwork, the more unsteady play of atmosphere, the softer contours, and the more complete fusion of the details. Facial expression likewise contributes. In all three of the Eakins paintings we have examined, the expression of the features portrayed is abstract. Mrs. Bacon's, however, is hard and unflinching, *The Thinker's* gentler, more subtle in its mood, while the violinist's is dreamy, sensitive, even lyric and "musical" in suggestion. That we make no mistake in our interpretation of the third picture, Eakins has introduced on the wall, partly hidden by the frame, a print of one of the most decorative *japonnaiseries* of nineteenth century Europe, Whistler's portrait of the Spanish violinist, Sarasate.

Along the road of increasingly intimate expression, Weir in 1905 reached his highest level of accomplishment. In *The Rose Pink Bodice*, owned by the painter's daughter, Dorothy Weir (Mrs. Mahonri) Young, tonal blur plays a more active rôle; objects grow less definite; movement becomes less direct and corporeal, more flickering and suggested (Fig. 3).⁴ Verticality of emphasis in the general composition replaces the horizontality of the *Roses* and the diagonal stress of *The Gray Bodice*. Coloring is more quiet, values subtler, planes softer, forms more open, space deeper but less definitely articulated.

This culmination of gentleness in mode of statement is short-lived. By 1908 J. Alden

3. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

4. Courtesy of Mrs. Mahonri Young.

Weir is in the act of making another basic change. Note his *Building a Dam*, Shetucket, in the Cleveland Museum of Art. Open form in it has become purely fragmentary form. Atmospheric shimmer has become a dynamic opposition of ragged color patches. Recession into distance has yielded to a counter movement; broken spots of light now burst out from the background to protrude beyond the values of anything in front. Planes are loosely defined; instead of receding obliquely, however, they now tend to parallel the picture plane.

Weir confirms the new manner in 1911 with his *Pussywillows*, another work in Mrs. Mahonri Young's collection. In it the attack is as coarsely direct as Weir ever allowed himself. So rough is the impasto, in fact, that shadows cast by the ridges of paint are made to do duty as substitutes for contour accents. Still more striking is the way fragments of light break aggressively forward.

Corresponding to Weir's change of manner is that again of Thomas Eakins. Look, for instance, at Eakins' portrait of Mrs. Gilbert Lafayette Parker, in the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston (Fig. 4).⁵ Signed and dated on the back as of 1910, it displays an openness of form, a brusqueness of brushwork, and a free play with fragments of light and dark almost phenomenal in the perspective of Eakins' earlier *œuvre*. Note how obscurely the coat merges with the background, how boldly the lacework comes forth from the gloom, how startlingly the cast shadows break into the planes of the face, how strikingly the little touches of light obtrude.

In terms of pictorial form, the manner Weir and Eakins followed from at least 1898 to 1906 might be called a tonal withdrawal mode, the manner succeeding it and continuing until at least 1911, an aggressively fragmentary mode. The question arises: do these periods in the painting of Weir and Eakins correspond to formal periods in the course of the development of twentieth century American art? The answer lies in a comprehensive inquiry. To facilitate it we may make a chronological chart, arrange the painters in the order of their age at the top, list their respective works in a sequence of years underneath, and add brief notes on the formal analysis of each painting. Painters will group themselves under this treatment according to two categories: vertically, according to certain traditions inherited from the past and transmitted to the future; horizontally, according to common elements representing a mode of seeing and expressing in vogue at a given time. By examining the chronology of some hundred or more painters active in each period, we may uncover in this way a surprising uniformity of mode within a given period and an unexpected uniformity of change in mode down even to the present day.

We cannot go far, however, without encountering certain important complications. We shall find older painters retaining outworn conventions along with later changes. We shall find differences in the receptivity of a current mode proportionate to differences in past tradition. We shall find some painters assimilating a given mode, others paying it lip service only. We shall find the impact of foreign influence modifying in various degrees the current manifestations of the mode in question. The validity of our conclusions must depend upon the extent to which we keep such considerations in mind and give them all due weight.

During the first decade of the twentieth century Julian Alden Weir and Thomas Eakins belonged with the older generation. If the changes noted in their work are to be taken for a general trend, younger painters of the time must be shown to reflect in a still more positive and exclusive fashion the earmarks of the changing modes. Such proves to be the case. Consider, for example, a man twenty-one years younger than Eakins, Robert Henri, leader of the "Ashcan School." In the *Storm Tide*, of 1903, now in the Whitney Museum, Henri

5. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

pushes the sheds on the shore back with a dash beyond the obliquely receding foreground wave. In the *Workingman*, of 1910, in the Metropolitan Museum, he reverses his emphasis violently, slashes in the strokes with all the power at his command, hacks out the planes of the face in abruptly advancing fragments (Fig. 6).⁶

Eakins adhered formally throughout his career to a literal tonal tradition, Weir to an attenuated tonal tradition, Henri to a fragmentary tonal tradition. In the light of what we have discovered about the mode of a time, the literal tonal tradition of Eakins would seem to have dominated the eighteen-eighties, the attenuated tonal tradition of Weir the early nineteen-hundreds, and the fragmentary tonal tradition of Henri later nineteen-hundreds. In a formal tradition totally at odds with all three of these was Arthur B. Davies. His tradition might be called a schematic, linear tradition. But Davies, with all his difference in outlook, changed as much in mode as Eakins, Weir, or Henri to meet each change of time. Observe his *Full-orbed Moon*, of 1901, in the Art Institute of Chicago, with its obliquely receding planes, its asymmetrical balance, its casual arrangement, its filmy blur of contour. Observe again his *Tiptoeing Youth*, of 1910, in the Whitney Museum of American Art, with its planes loosely defined but parallel to the picture plane, its dynamically fragmentary attack, its aggressively expressive drama of ragged patches of light.

Childe Hassam probably came as close to French Impressionism of the early eighteen-eighties as any American of the present century. However, this fact did not prevent him from altering his art to conform directly to changes of mode at home. The *Bailey's Beach*, Newport, of 1910, in the Art Institute of Chicago, presents everything in a state of shimmer-flux, well removed from the unobtrusive foreground, but reached by an obliquely receding shore and obliquely receding rocks and ripples. Another Hassam in the Art Institute of Chicago, the *Willows*, of 1912, schematizes the broken color of impressionism into boldly dashed-in strokes, interrupts in mid career the obliquely receding row of trees, and through their foliage wrenches forth a broken patch of light to represent the miniature figure of a girl.

Every painter, old or young, realist or lyricist, provincial or cosmopolitan, independent or eclectic, is as much a child of his age and home in twentieth century America as Heinrich Wölfflin has shown Raphael and Titian to have been in sixteenth century Italy, or Vermeer and Rembrandt in seventeenth century Holland. Such is the testimony of a formal approach to the history of a recent era in the development of American painting.

The growing expressiveness of American painting under the leadership of Weir and his associates in "The Ten" and the later leadership of Henri and his associates in "The Eight" during the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth century had by 1913 cleared the decks for the most revolutionizing influx of foreign influences this country's art has ever seen. The historical occasion for this invasion was the show at the Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory in New York. The guiding genius for both the exhibition and the invasion was Arthur B. Davies, while the formative influences came from the later Cézanne and the Picasso of early cubism; the tradition leading the field during the years immediately following the Armory Show, and modifying the manner of expression in every other tradition, was that which Davies dominated, the schematic linear.

Davies set the pace with such experimental compositions as *The Great Mother*, of 1913, in the Corcoran Gallery (Fig. 7).⁷ In this picture real space and real illumination have given way to a semi-abstract all-over pattern and an arbitrary value scheme. Triangular planes of light and shadow interlock, fuse, surround, and penetrate the figures. The

6. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

7. Courtesy of the Corcoran Gallery, Washington.

figures are freely distorted in their positions, their contours and their proportions. Thin, crisply drawn lines provide the desired accents. Short, strong touches of dark establish a rhythm independent of the objects. Small notes of high and low values spread about over the whole canvas, creating a restless stir within the bounding triangles of tone established at either side.

The schematic linear tradition continued to dominate American painting until 1921 or 1922, as long, in fact, as a social psychology attending the stress of the World War period would seem to have demanded a manner of painting verging upon the abstract. The painters most clearly reflecting this influence were schematic linearists still in the formative years of their thirties, men who have since retained much of the manner then developed. Among them are Maurice Sterne, George Biddle, Boardman Robinson, Lyonel Feininger, Joseph Stella, A. S. Baylinson, Maurice Compris, Andrew Michael Dasburg, Todros Geller, Georgia O'Keeffe, Abraham Walkowitz, and Rockwell Kent.

It is, moreover, among the younger representatives of the other formal traditions that the schematic linear influence is most clearly reflected and longest retained. George Bellows, fragmentary tonalist, had already in 1909 with the *Stag at Sharkey's* surpassed his master, Henri, in sheer power of expression. Bellows in *The Sand Team*, of 1917, in the Brooklyn Museum, takes up with equal gusto the current flat-pattern mode, dashes in heavily the linear stresses then in vogue, plays with spirited animation at the movement rocking inward from the sides, set up by circular patches of light for the white horses, the white shirts of the men, the sunlit faces of the cliffs, and the mountain slopes. Even more stimulated by the trend were artists professing the schematic in tone and in color, tonalists such as Maurice Prendergast, Allen Tucker, Benjamin Kopman, or Max Weber, colorists such as Ernest Lawson, John Noble, or John Marin.

The mode of the 'teens had been anticipated as early as 1908 by the members of the Stieglitz group, and especially by Arthur G. Dove. Although Dove worked as much in the aggressively fragmentary mode as any other painter at the time, he was helped by his schematic tonalism to reach with *Nature Symbolized*, in 1910, a state of complete abstraction. This abstract vein continued, symbological, only rarely and slightly representational, but changing constantly with each general change in manner. The course of this transformation followed a road towards increasingly larger compositional units and fuller, longer rhythmic periods. The stage reached by the end of the flat-pattern phase of twentieth century American painting is marked by such of Dove's works as the *Thunderstorm*, of 1921 (Fig. 13).⁸ From a series of three great circular clouds, modeled according to an abstract formula and covering the major portion of the canvas, drop long streaks of rain and a saw-toothed band of lightning upon a dark patch of earth, shaped like the section of a rotary saw.

As a matter of fact, Dove's *Thunderstorm* is transitional to a new mode dominant in American painting from 1922 to 1929. By virtue of the visual elements apparent in representative works, we may call it the undulating planar mode. The dominant figure of the preceding decade felt its impact strongly, and allowed it completely to transform his manner. The Metropolitan's *Italian Hill Town*, painted by Arthur B. Davies in 1925 (Fig. 5),⁹ marks the artist as still essentially the schematic linearist, for the white bulls on the nearby slope and the houses of the town perched upon the hill beyond are traced with as sharp an edge as that of the figures in *The Great Mother*. Clear-toned harmonies of grayed coloring

8. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Columbus.

9. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



FIG. 8—*Boston, Museum: Room in Brooklyn*, by Edward Hopper



FIG. 9—*11 A.M.*, by Edward Hopper



FIG. 10—*Artist's Collection: Composition in Light*, by R. F. Wolff

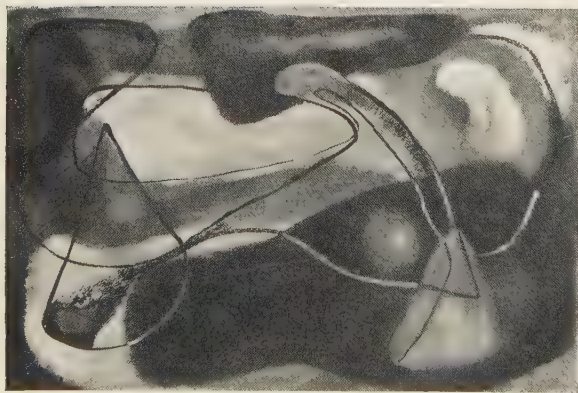


FIG. 12—*Artist's Collection: Space Composition*, by R. F. Wolff



FIG. 11—*Jefferson City, Capitol: Mural*, by Thomas Benton



FIG. 13—*Columbus, Museum of Fine Arts: Thunderstorm*, by A. G. Dove

are as fully insisted upon, and contrasts of value and of line direction play back and forth as freely. At the same time, new features distinguish the picture. Incidents of light and dark relate to each other, not with the broken, dramatic contrasts of the 1914 composition, but with a fluent grace accentuated by the billowing curves which form the contours. The space is constructed clearly in a series of overlapping planes designed to express the distance of the view. They parallel the picture plane, articulate the space clearly and concretely, and step back in a sequence of impasto gradations, color intensities, values, and softenings of contour.

Nevertheless, it was no longer Davies who dominated the field; it was, rather, a group of younger painters, many totally inactive and unheard of during the preceding decade, but painters fitted temperamentally to meet the demands of a new post-war psychology, a relaxing, classicizing reaction. They were the revivalists of a tradition upheld during another post-war period, the eighteen-sixties and eighteen-seventies, by such influential genre painters as Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer. The tradition dominant in this undulating planar period may be characterized formally as an illuminated planar tradition, and traced in the nineteen-twenties through the work of Henry Lee McFee, Samuel Halpert, Edward Bruce, Edward Hopper, Sidney Laufman, Walt Kuhn, Robert Winthrop Chanler, Georgina Klitgaard, Leon Kroll, J. Theodore Johnson, Robert Brackman, Dorothy Varian, Clarence K. Chatterton, Vincent Canadé, Glenn O. Coleman, and a host of others.

The art of the time seems to have been partially compounded of elements from a number of foreign sources: from the later stages of French cubism, for example, with their stress upon textures and their predilection for rectilinear shapes; or from the more recent phases of a new objectivity typified by an insistence upon the bulk of objects and the rhythm of their contours, evident in the neo-plastic compositions of Picasso, Derain, and Kisling; or from the "floating-eye" perspectives, the contrasts of line against tonal background, and the rhythmic linear organizations of the paintings of fourteenth and fifteenth century China. Particularly close to Chinese sources are the Davies we have just examined and contemporary compositions of the middle nineteen-twenties by Halpert, Bruce, Chanler, Kroll, and Klitgaard. Closer to French cubism and neo-plasticism are the works of the same years by Canadé, Kuhn, McFee, and Laufman.

If any one man could be called the leader of this manner, it would be Edward Hopper. *The Eleven A.M.*, of 1927, is characteristic of his art at its ripest (Fig. 9). The painting depicts the typical hotel room, the typical attitude and the typical proportions of a city girl seated nude before an open window. It is as coolly impersonal as the architecture bounding its space. Contours are precise, forms integrated and balanced, essential details revealed clearly in the shadow as in the sunlight. The structure of the composition is solid; the movement is measured and disciplined.

Still another tendency has made its appearance by 1932 in Hopper's *Room in Brooklyn* of the Boston Museum (Fig. 8).¹⁰ The steady glow of sunlight evident in the preceding work and developed by Hopper under the mode of the nineteen-twenties still persists. But forms spread out no longer in planes parallel to the plane of the picture; instead, walls, window frames, table tops, and the sides of the tenement buildings outside slope away obliquely to the right, while the planes of the girl's figure and of the rocker in which she is seated extend slightly in the other direction. Flowers in the vase on the stand by the window, the girl's head, and the back of the chair break the horizontal and the vertical lines of the architecture abruptly, setting up an angular opposition of elements and a dis-

10. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

tinctly restless tension. It is curious to remark that this feature occurs, strangely enough, along with an almost glass-like smoothness of the surface of the paint.

A caption to denote such a tendency in mode might be "the spatial dynamic." This most recent trend has prevailed in American painting during the depression years from 1929 to 1936, and would seem to have derived from the art of Kenneth Hayes Miller, Thomas Benton, and their pupils and followers in a so-called plastic tradition. It is exemplified at the end of its development in the Missouri Murals painted by Benton in 1936 on the walls of the Missouri State House at Jefferson City (Fig. 11). The panel illustrated juxtaposes a number of scenes representative of the history of the state: Daniel Boone Hunting for 'Coons; A Political Rally; The Beginnings of Agriculture; etc. Much could be said about the subject matter, the figure types, the fact that the panel is a mural rendered in tempera. But most significant for the present purpose is the visual form in which the composition has been achieved.

An incomparably expansive spatial composition is here presented, a spatial composition in which the mother attending her baby at the rear of the rally is rendered with no less fidelity to matter-of-fact details than is the victim of a lynching hanging to a tree against the cloud of smoke in the extreme distance. Obliquely receding planes everywhere lead rapidly into depth. Whatever else may be said of it, the composition crackles with electric energy and swells with physical power. Curves and angles are tellingly opposed throughout. Surfaces are uniformly hard and tense. Contours wiggle and writhe with a life of their own. Edges of shadow swirl about in sympathy. Cast shadows, when they do appear, fall in directions independent of any source of light, dependent solely upon considerations of design. Reds, blues, and yellows are the only hues employed. They gather in local areas for contrast to clarify the parts, but a black runs through them all to subdue their intensities and to draw them together. Space, modeling, delineation, lighting, coloring, all are used abstractly, all are trained in concert to gain consistency of effect, dynamic force, a spatial unity of many separate parts.

The abstract elements in the more recent art of Thomas Benton may not have been intended. However, they do seem to indicate a coming trend. It may not last for long. Our investigation has disclosed the fact that no pictorial mode in twentieth century America has lasted for more than six or seven years. But the new wind is blowing American painters very definitely towards abstraction, towards an abstraction distinguishable from the manner of the 'teens in its relatively greater adherence to the third dimension, and its greater emotional expression. Among the younger painters this trend is especially to be noted. It has modified the recent work of the mural painters, from John Ballator to Howard Cook. It has altered the manner of the social protest painters from Aaron Bohrod to William Gropper. It has increased the following of a school new to literalist America, the school of pure abstraction.

Prominent among painters in this so-called abstractionist school is the Chicago watercolorist, Robert Jay Wolff. Contrary to what many claim as a mark of "escapism," Wolff's turn to abstraction came in 1936 only after his interest had been aroused in the present social crisis. One of the first examples of this new development is his watercolor, *Composition in Light*, painted early in 1937 (Fig. 10).¹¹ It conforms to the mode of the Benton murals of the preceding year in both spatial realization and contour definition. Beyond a network of rich bluish and reddish blacks, suggestive of scaffolding, a space of luminous greens, reds, and yellows extends indefinitely. Much is made of the dynamic possibilities

11. Courtesy of the artist.

of angular contrasts. Every shape is hard and clear, its position asymmetrical, and its direction of axis oblique, oblique both with reference to the frame and to the picture plane. At the same time, the representational element has been reduced to a minimum.

During the year 1937 we note what may represent the beginnings of a new mode. It would seem to constitute a swing away from the linear emphasis and the articulated space of paintings done during the early nineteen-thirties, a push in the opposite direction again towards the tonal, towards the undefined, unbounded fragment of space. Characteristic of this hypothetical and still nascent mode is another watercolor by Robert Jay Wolff, painted during the summer of 1937, and entitled *Space Composition* (Fig. 12).¹² Angularities yield in it to the curvilinear. The dynamism of former linear contrasts gives way to a dynamism of patches of contrasting values and hues which seem actually to change in shape and tempo as one looks at them. Elements again begin to lead upward from the sides and inward towards the center by way of circular paths, much as they had in the paintings of the earlier flat-pattern mode. Contours are blurred once more; the heavy lines which swirl and whip about before the larger masses beyond exist not as outlines but as separate entities setting the pace for the movement of the whole. The shapes are not geometric and mechanical; they are organic, weird, monstrous, even ominous in suggestion.

If the latest works of Robert Jay Wolff are indicative of a general trend in American painting today and this new trend is to be allowed to develop for the several years we have seen each preceding mode to require, then we are in a fair position to prophesy what the immediate future of American painting has in store for us. If analogies drawn between the mode of the later Wolff and the mode of the World War years can be shown to hold for the majority of the paintings now being produced, and the earlier mode can be shown to express the group mind of that time of catastrophe, then the resulting implications might well give us pause.

12. Courtesy of the artist.

